

MOBUTU Sese Seko
(Phonetic: moBOOtoo)

ZAIRE

President (since November 1965)

*Addressed as: Mr. President or
Citizen President*

Seizing power in a bloodless coup in 1965, Mobutu Sese Seko ended five years of military mutinies, ethnic bloodletting, and successionist struggles that wracked his country after it gained independence from Belgium. He was sworn in as elected President in 1971 and is now in his third consecutive seven-year term. Mobutu concurrently serves as founder-president of the Popular Movement of the Revolution (MPR, Zaire's only political party), State Commissioner (minister) for National Defense, and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces.



Mobutu was born on 14 October 1930. He enlisted in the Belgian colonial army in 1950 and was trained as a clerk. He subsequently served as a stenographer with the general staff in Kinshasa and was part-time editor of an army periodical. Leaving the military as a sergeant in 1956, he continued as a journalist and became involved in politics. In Brussels during the late 1950s, he was a trainee in public relations at a colonial information agency and took courses at the Press House and the Advanced Institute of Social Studies. Shortly after independence, he was named Army Chief of Staff. A few months later he seized power, only to return it almost immediately to civilians. In 1961 he was named Commander of the new National Army. He subsequently received paratroop training in Israel. He founded the MPR in 1967, after he had taken power for the second time.

Widely traveled, Mobutu has visited the United States many times; he was last here in June 1988. He has met President Bush on several occasions, most recently in February 1989 during Japanese Emperor Hirohito's funeral. Since 1982 Mobutu has held the military rank of marshal. He has several honorary degrees, including one in law from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh; he has been awarded the US Legion of Merit and many other decorations. Mobutu speaks French. He is married to Mama Bobi Ladawa, who devotes time to social work. He has several children, one of whom, Mobutu Nyiwa, currently serves as Minister of State for International Cooperation.

12 June 1989